

**www.aesf.org—A Work-in-Progress
Enhances Member Service & Entertainment**

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AESF's interactive website was first implemented to increase communications by giving AESF members—especially those serving on boards and committees—a quick and easy way to be in touch. Over the past six months, however, aesf.org has considerably expanded its capabilities, helping members stay informed on issues, regulations and new technologies: The Bookstore is now on-line, with a secure site for convenient ordering of educational materials; “Test Your Plating IQ,” provided for entertainment and education, is updated weekly; and “The Washington Line” is updated when the latest reports are issued by the Government Relations Office. Complete conference program and exhibit details, training course descriptions and schedules, and featured articles from Plating and Surface Finishing are all available with a click of the mouse. This presentation will highlight popular features now in place and discuss important features planned for future implementation.

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Some technological developments have made such an impact that they have virtually changed our lives. In the 1950s, black-and-white television sets became available to consumers. Those who wanted to be the first to impress usually opened their doors to neighbors and their children to view the miracle of television—all who were eager to see anything, even if it were only a test pattern! Soon television became a companion and increased our circle of friends. The Ricardos, the Mertzes and Steve Allen were welcomed into our living rooms, paving the way for “South Park” in the ’90s. (I’m not so sure that was a good thing.)

Today, television has permeated our lives to such an extent that most of us have at least two color television sets at home. Some of us have a set in every room! If we go camping or boating, there are battery-operated models we can take along to keep us company.

Well, move over, television, and make way for the personal computer. Since the 1980s, when computers became widely available to the business and consumer markets, their use has grown dramatically. There are speakers on this panel who can probably give exact statistics, but I’ve heard that an estimated 40 percent of the households in America now own a personal computer. I’m going to take a wild guess that the percentage is even higher than that and still skyrocketing. Most of those computers are likely tied to the World Wide Web.

We are getting used to having a virtual library at our fingertips.

Traveling: Go to the Web and get directions, street by street to your destination. While you’re there, check out the weather at your destination.

Got a specific medical condition? Muscle sprains from carrying your laptop so that you can stay connected all the time? Read all about your specific malady and others on the Web.

Want news? You don’t have to wait for the 6 p.m. or 10 p.m. edition on television. Just log on. Get an instant update.

Shopping? UPS and other parcel post services are now doing a burgeoning business because of people who are doing their shopping on the Web.

We could go on and on. The point is that the Web has invaded our lives and it’s getting bigger every day. Instant gratification is the name of the game. All businesses and organizations—if they plan to grow—have websites.

www.aesf.org

That brings us to AESF’s website. Originally started two years ago to increase communication among AESF’s branches and boards, sections and committees, our website has been expanded considerably and is now a real work in progress. We are continually adding pages and special fea-

tures to serve not only our membership, but the general public as well.

Our website is not complicated. It is presented in very logical fashion, with all important information accessible off the homepage. Let’s take a look at some of the important segments.

Information for the General Public

All About AESF

What is Surface Finishing?

Regarding the general public, for example, those who are curious about our organization can click on “All About AESF” and get an overview of what the Society is all about: its mission and the publics it serves. People browsing here could be potential members—or members of some environmental group. Our job is to inform with the basics.

We serve a young interest group, too. Traditionally, AESF receives perhaps 200 requests a year from school children who are looking for information on electroplating for science projects. By clicking on “What is Surface Finishing?” at the very top of our homepage, they are now able to get instant answers. This is especially good for parents, since most science projects are often started just a few days—hours?—before they are due. Incidentally, after we began offering this info spot on our homepage, the number of inquiries from school children went down, leading me to believe that today’s youngsters are adept at going to the Web to get answers.

AESF . . . and Its Mission

AESF offers a world of opportunity for finishers. AESF’s mission statement and the “publics” it provides technical assistance to are listed prominently on the screen. There’s a brief statement on “Why You Should Join,” with an invitation to become an AESF member by using a secure on-line application form.

AESF Sponsors Major Conferences

Scroll down AESF’s homepage to the area concerning the major conferences sponsored by the AESF. With a click on each, you’ll find basic facts (the traditional press release), complete program information, a list of exhibitors (if applicable), travel discounts (if applicable) and access to registration forms and hotel forms that can be downloaded. [As of this writing (March 2000), plans were being made to allow individuals to register on line via a secure site.] As conference programs change—which they often do—the new information is posted on the website.

Plating and Surface Finishing

At this time, AESF’s website and its official journal, *Plating and Surface Finishing (P&SF)*, are designed to complement—not replace—each other. The highlights of the current issue (not complete articles) are posted, as well as the “President’s Corner” column. “Test Your Plating I.Q.” a

popular quiz series started in the journal more than 20 years ago, is revisited on the website. A different quiz from the archives is posted each week for the entertainment of those who enjoy crossword puzzles and other brainteasers. The I.Q., of course, is directly related to finishing information.

Other pages that can be accessed from the *P&SF* area include:

- Help wanted—classifieds
- Government Relations Contributors (as listed in the most recent issue)
- Advertising QwikLynx (information on and hot links to advertisers in *P&SF*; currently, this is a free service to advertisers)
- Instructions for authors (here's how to get started if you want to be published in *P&SF*)

AESF's Bookstore

This site contains information on all the books, proceedings, logo items, videos and CD-ROMs that AESF offers for sale. You can fill up your shopping cart with confidence on this secure site.

Training Courses & Workshops

Complete course descriptions and schedules are available here for each current course offered by the AESF. {Once again, as of this writing (March 2000), plans are to offer the convenience of registering on line via a secure site.]

There's more!

We've scrolled down the major areas of AESF's website, but there are still some more important features to show you. Let's go back to the top of the homepage.

Look in the Narrow Blue Column

News Flash!

On the left side of AESF's homepage is a light-blue shaded area that contains some special hot buttons. "News Flash!" is a section that can be changed on a daily basis, if necessary. We use it to alert browsers to late-breaking news items of real importance to finishers. Make it a habit to check it often.

AESF Branch Pages

Each AESF branch has a page on which to post meeting notices, news and other important information. This section was designed so that branches could post their own information, without assistance from headquarters. Plans are in the works to make it even easier for branches to make full use of these pages.

AESF Committee Pages

Same principle. Each board, section and committee has its own page, and it's the responsibility of a designated member from each board, section or committee to post minutes and other news on these pages. Like the branch pages, plans are in the works to make it easier for boards, sections and

committees to use these pages without assistance from headquarters.

AESF Research

Find out about AESF's well-established research program and how you can participate.

AESF Government Relations

Through the joint government relations program, AESF offers technical assistance to government agencies regarding rules and regulations. Click on this to learn more about this important program and how you can become involved.

SFIC Washington Line

Bi-weekly (or on an as-needed basis), the joint government relations office in Washington, DC issues its "Washington Line," a newsletter on the status of important issues facing the industry. These reports are posted as soon as they are received at headquarters so that all members may have instant access to what's happening on the Hill and nationwide.

Links

Originally, this page featured surface finishing-related organizations and government agencies. In March 2000, a new feature was added: Finishing shops that are supporting the AESF through memberships are now able to have a link from AESF's site.

Contacts

This page features names and numbers for AESF staff and the Board of Directors. Communication is important to growth! Contact the directors and give them your suggestions and comments.

Acknowledgment

The term "web" is no misnomer, and it helps to have several individuals working to check on all the places where time-sensitive material is interwoven so we won't have embarrassingly old information showing. Currently, a team of individuals is responsible for the efficient operation of AESF's website. Those of us on the AESF staff appreciate the support we receive from George Cushnie and Mark Eelman of CAIweb, our server. Christian Richter and other members of the government relations staff in Washington contribute the "Washington Line" and any information pertaining to regulations. Our web pages are designed by Lisa Eastman, AESF's graphic designer, who also does much of the routine maintenance of pages. It is through Lisa's support and the assistance of remarkable computer software (supported by Cecilio Casiano, AESF's EDP manager) that it is possible for people like me to update pages and post programs/messages of high interest on a timely basis.

Contact AESF

Suggestions & Comments

The Internet is an efficient, cost-effective way for the AESF to keep you updated on what's going on within the organization and within the industry. While we will still continue to use direct mail and broadcast FAX to bring you important information, the information that's posted on aesf.org is updated on a daily basis. so, if you're one of the millions of personal computer users who are connected to a web service provider, click on us at least once a week. We'll do our best to keep you informed, help you in your career and even entertain you.

The Internet thrives on two-way and multi-directional communication. It so easy to make your opinions heard and get answers to questions. Please use one the "Contact AESF" or "Suggestions & Comments" spot on the homepage to let us hear from you. (You'll find other spots within different pages where you can e-mail specific individuals or AESF Headquarters.)

As stated at the beginning of this talk, AESF's site is a work in progress. Our goal is to provide you the information you want—as complete and as fast as we can give it to you. So please, give us your suggestions and comments. The Internet is free! No postage required. In some cases, you'll get an answer back in the same day—or at least by the next day.

Keep those e-mails coming!